New Hanover County Natural Area Inventory

BALD HEAD/SMITH ISLAND MACROSITE
Significant Natural Heritage Area

Nationally significant Bald Head/Smith Island Macrosite forms the southeastern corner of Cape Fear Megasite. It is located at the extreme southern end of New Hanover County and extends southward from Fort Fisher State Recreation Area to Bald Head Island in Brunswick County. It includes Zekes Island, North Island, Smith Island, other barrier spits, beaches, and estuarine islands, plus tidal marshes and creeks, and open estuarine waters. In New Hanover County, the macrosite comprises Fort Fisher State Recreation Area and Zekes Island Marshes and Beaches (the latter shared with Brunswick County). Both of these standard sites contain good to high quality dune, sand flats, and tidal marsh habitat, including one of the best examples of the Salt Marsh community in North Carolina. The New Hanover County portion of the macrosite is also a highly significant area for rare species, supporting Federally and State Threatened populations of two turtle species and one bird species. Two plant species and another bird species are also recognized as Federal Species of Concern. Altogether, the New Hanover County portion of the site supports populations of 12 rare animals.

Among the most significant features in the macrosite are the maritime forest communities found on the Bald Head Island/Smith Island sand ridges in Brunswick County. The occurrence of the Maritime Evergreen Forest is the best developed and most extensive example in southeastern North Carolina. This forest is unusual in North Carolina because of the subtropical influence exhibited by such species as cabbage palm (*Sabal palmetto*). The Maritime Shrub community is also well-developed and includes components not seen in other areas.

Areas within the macrosite not included within a standard site have been determined to be of lesser significance, but important to the overall integrity of the area, such as by providing landscape connections for animal populations and insuring the integrity of standard sites.